

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /068 W
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R 271742Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4927
INFO DIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 02696

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 1978: THE PCF: RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL?

SUMMARY. PCF SECRETARY GENERAL GEORGES MARCHAIS HAS BEEN BEATING A NEW LINE IN PUBLIC SPEECHES AND PRESS CONFERENCES IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, NAMELY THAT "THERE WILL BE COMMUNIST MINISTERS IN THE GOVERNMENT AFTER THE LEFT WINS THE ELECTIONS." THIS THEME HAS BEEN ECHOED BY HIS AIDES PAUL LAURENT, JEAN KANAPA AND CHARLES FITERMAN. THE NEW TACK COMES AFTER MONTHS OF UNPRECEDENTED ATTACKS BY THE PCF ON ITS SOCIALIST PARTNERS FOR BETRAYING THE LEFT IN FAVOR OF THE CENTER/
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RIGHT AND FOR ADOPTING A PRO-NATO, ATLANTIST FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY. WHILE THE PCF HAS NOT ABANDONED ITS ATTACKS ON THE SOCIALISTS, THE NEW LINE MAY MEAN THAT THE PCF WISHES TO OFFSET THE IMPRESSION AMONG THE PUBLIC AND EVEN WITH SOME PARTY MEMBERS AFTER THREE MONTHS OF POLEMICS THAT THE PCF DOES NOT WANT TO COME TO POWER. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PARTY IS KEEPING ITS OPTIONS OPEN:

PREPARING ITSELF FOR THE DAY WHEN THE SITUATION MAY PERMIT IT TO CHOOSE WHETHER OR NOT TO COOPERATE ON THE SECOND ROUND VOTE WITH THE PS AND JOIN IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THESE STATEMENTS ARE TOO WELL ORCHESTRATED IN THE PC CONTEXT TO BE COINCIDENTAL AND AT A TOO HIGH LEVEL TO BE JUST ANOTHER TRIAL BALLOON. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY DO NOT GIVE ANYTHING AWAY TO THE PS IN TERMS OF PROGRAMMATIC CONCESSIONS. THE OTHER PARTNERS HAVE THEREFORE REACTED WITH CAUTION. PS FIRST SECRETARY FRANCOIS MITTERRAND SAID HE INTENDS TO WAIT FOR OTHER WORDS AND ACTS BEFORE JUDGING EXACTLY THE NATURE OF THE PC/CHANGE -- IF INDEED THERE IS A CHANGE. PS NATIONAL SECRETARY LIONEL JOSPIN ECHOED THIS RESERVE IN POINTING OUT THAT MARCHAIS DID NOT REPLY TO THE BASIC QUESTION OF SUPPORT ON THE SECOND ROUND OF VOTING; ON THIS POINT, MARCHAIS HAS NOT CHANGED HIS POSITION, JOSPIN CONCLUDED. MRG PRESIDENT ROBERT FABRE WENT SLIGHTLY FURTHER IN WELCOMING MARCHAIS' NEW TONE, WHICH NO LONGER CONSIDERS HIS PARTNERS AS ADVERSARIES. THE TWO LEFT PARTNERS HAVE BEEN VILLIFIED TOO MUCH IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS TO BE CONVINCED OF A CHANGE BY A FEW GRATUITOUS REMARKS, WHICH COULD BE REVOKED AS EASILY AS THEY WERE MADE. THE PS ESPECIALLY, THE PCF'S MAIN TARGET SINCE THE SEPTEMBER SPLIT, CAN BE EXPECTED TO WAIT FOR MORE
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EVIDENCE OF THE PRESUMED PCF CHANGE BEFORE BELIEVING ITS EARS AND REACTING IN CONCRETE TERMS.

2. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE PCF CHANGE OF HEART, IF SUCH IS THE CASE, ARE AS HARD TO PIN DOWN AS THEY WERE AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 23 BREAK. ONE OFFICIAL IN THE POLITICAL DIRECTORATE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR SAID THE PCF HAS SWITCHED UNEXPECTEDLY 180 DEGREES SO MANY TIMES RECENTLY THAT HE DESPAIRS IN TRYING TO EXPLAIN RATIONALLY ITS ACTIONS. DESPITE THIS RATHER TYPICAL REACTION OF DESPAIR BY NON-PARTY OBSERVERS, IT OCCURS TO US THAT THERE COULD BE AT LEAST TWO MOTIVATIONS FOR A CHANGE:

-- FIRST, TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PS TO MAKE ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS, NOW THAT AN ELECTORAL PACT IS IN SIGHT, AND PERHAPS EVEN AN AGREEMENT ON A LEFT GOVERNMENT AFTER MARCH. THE PCF COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO EXPECT SOME MOVEMENT ON THIS SCORE AFTER MITTERRAND AGREED TO 2400 FRANC A MONTH MINIMUM WAGE AND WENT FURTHER IN GENERAL TERMS ON NATIONALIZATIONS AND TAXING THE RICH. A MORE MISCHIEVOUS VARIATION OF THIS THEORY IS THAT THE PCF, SEEING THAT THE

PS HAS BEEN PICKING UP CENTRIST SUPPORT AFTER
THE SEPTEMBER BREAK, IS PLAYING A SPOILER
ROLE TO SCARE OFF WHAT ADDITIONAL MODERATE
SUPPORT THE PS IS HOPING FOR.

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-- OR, THE PCF, FOR INTERNAL REASONS, BELIEVES
THE PARTY IS BETTER OFF GOING INTO A GOVERN-
MENT WITH THE PS ON AT LEAST MINIMUM TERMS
THAN REMAINING IN THE OPPOSITION OR EXCLUDED
FROM A MINORITY SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT. TO SUP-
PORT THIS THESIS, ONE COULD POINT TO HINTS THAT
THE ANTI-PS LINE HAS BEEN HARD TO SWALLOW FOR
AN INDETERMINATE NUMBER OF MILITANTS AT THE
GRASS ROOTS, THAT THE PCF HAS BEEN GENERALLY
BLAMED BY THE PUBLIC FOR THE BREAKUP (THUS DIS-
APPOINTING THE 50 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH ELEC-

TORATE WHICH BELIEVES THAT THE TIME HAS COME
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FOR A CHANGE IN FRANCE), THAT THE PCF FEARED
THAT ITS VOTER SCORE COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO
GO ABOVE ITS PRESENT 21 PERCENT, AND THAT THE
ELECTORAL SPREAD BETWEEN IT AND THE PS WAS EVEN
GROWING.

3. THESE TWO THEORIES ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. IN-
DEED IT WOULD BE VERY MUCH IN THE PCF CHARACTER TO BLOW
HOT AND COLD AT THE SAME TIME, TO KEEP ALL OPTIONS OPEN
UNTIL THE RIGHT TIME (JUST BEFORE THE ELECTIONS) AND
WATCH CLOSELY THE EFFECTS OF EACH TACTIC ON ITS NATIONAL
POPULARITY AND ITS RECRUITMENT DRIVE. PCF AMBIVALENCE
MAY ALSO REFLECT SOME SQUABBLING WITHIN THE PARTY LEA-
DERSHIP. WE DO NOT EXPECT THE LATEST ZIG-ZAG BY THE
PCF TO HAVE MUCH EFFECT ON THE LEFT'S POPULARITY. THE
SEPTEMBER BREAK HAS NOT CHANGED THE LEFT'S 52 PERCENT
SCORE IN VOTER INTENTIONS WHICH THUS APPEARS BASED MORE
ON A GENERAL MALAISE THAN ON PARTY MANEUVERINGS. WHETHER
THIS LATEST CHANGE WILL AFFECT THE UNDECIDED YOTE IS THE
ONLY UNKNOWN. WHAT CAN BE SEEN CLEARLY AT THIS POINT IS
A CHANGE IN TONE. GONE -- FOR THE MOMENT -- ARE THE TR-
EACHEROUS ATTACKS ON THE PS AND PERSONAL ABUSE OF MIT-
TERRAND. INSTEAD MARCHAIS TALKS OF HIS "SOCIALIST COMRA-
DES" AND ALMOST PLEADS WITH THEM TO RETURN TO THE FOLD
(SIC). NOTE: PCF ATTACKS MAY BE LESS STRIDENT TODAY,
BUT THEY CONTINUE. CHARLES FITERMAN SAID LAST MONTH THAT
IF THE PCF DID NOT COME TO POWER THIS TIME, THERE WOULD
BE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY IN THE FUTURE, OR EVEN THE TIME
AFTER THAT. IS THE TASTE FOR POWER, AFTER BEING IN A
POSITION SO RIPE FOR WINNING THE ELECTIONS, PROVING
IRRESISTIBLE? MORE LIKELY THE PCF IS POSITIONING ITSELF
TO NEGOTIATE FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH FOR THE DAY
WHEN IT MAY FEEL IT HAS MORE TO GAIN THAN TO LOSE FROM
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PARTICIPATION IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT.
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Message Attributes

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